

Numbers 25 - Thursday, January 13th, 2011

- By way of introduction, I have to warn you that this chapter is going to get a little gnarly, and even be a little depressing as well.
- Be that as it may, it also has profound implication and application to how we live our lives in the face of temptation and deception.

25:1 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. 2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

- There's a very important lesson here that we'd be remiss to not take some time to look at with regards to how this actually went down.
- Balak ultimately succeeds in his goal to have the Israelites cursed but Balaam doesn't bring it upon them, they bring it upon themselves.
- I find it interesting that in His letter to the church of Pergamum, Jesus has John write about how Balaam taught Balak to do this.

Revelation 2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. NIV

- It's been said that knowledge is information, but wisdom is the application of that information, and this is a good example of just that.
- In other words, we have this information here in Numbers, but unless we have the application to our own lives, we're wasting our time.
- This becomes clear in this letter to the church of Pergamum, for a number of reasons not the least of which is, the name is the nature.
- Here's the take away from all this; "whenever I disobey the Lord, knowingly and willfully sinning against the Lord, I bring it upon myself."
- There's a protection around my life that only comes from purity, conversely there's a destruction within my life that comes from impurity.
- As long as the Israelites remained under the spout where God's blessing comes out, no curse could ever be pronounced upon them.

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."

- At first this may seem disproportionately harsh unless, upon further examination, you realize that this was for the Israelites protection.
- In other words, if this open sin was not dealt with in an open way, the perversion could spread throughout the entire Israelite camp.
- Furthermore, God in His grace is sparing those who committed this sin from a more severe judgment by allowing them to continue in it.

6 And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

- This is where it sort of gets a little gnarly and intense. Picture the scene here with all that's happening with the killing of these people.
- In the midst of unspeakable chaos and bloodshed this man is seemingly bringing a Midianite woman to the Tabernacle in full view of all.
- Now, the commentators seem to be divided on what they were doing together, however, most suggest they engaged in a sexual act.
- Be that as it may, whatever they did was unthinkable because of what is about to happen in these next verses.

7 Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. 9 And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

- This is why it's believed that they were in a sexual act. Verse eight seems to indicate that the javelin went through both of their bodies.
- Now, notice that it's the boldness of Phinehas that apparently stops the plague. Sadly, it's not before twenty-four thousand people die.
- Here's what I'm thinking; "Sometimes it takes someone to do something, the difficult thing, in order to really make a difference in life."

- There's something else here that can easily be missed at first glance. Twenty-four thousand people die as a result of their own sin.
- They did to themselves inwardly what no one, or no amount of money could do them outwardly. Clearly, sin will reap its own reward.
- I sort of imagine Balak becoming very happy now, and Balaam becoming very rich now. They actually accomplished what they wanted.

10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. 12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.'"

- There is an amazingly stark contrast that is woven into the fabric of this blessing that's pronounced upon Phinehas for taking a stand.
- The one who stands in righteousness is blessed in his life, but the one who falls in unrighteousness brings a curse upon his life.
- We see this blessing upon Phinehas mentioned in the book of Psalms.

Psalm 106:28-31 NKJV They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, And ate sacrifices made to the dead. (29) Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, And the plague broke out among them. (30) Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, And the plague was stopped. (31) And that was accounted to him for righteousness To all generations forevermore.

14 Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. 15 And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he was head of the people of a father's house in Midian.

- Have you ever wondered why the Lord deemed it necessary to have the names of these people recorded in the pages of Holy Writ?
- I would suggest that these last verses hold for us the answer. Once again, the name is the nature giving us the why behind the what.

16 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 17 "Harass the Midianites, and attack them; 18 for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor."

- One thought is that the name Zimri means remember me, and Cozbi means deception, as evidenced by "their schemes of seduction."
- Here the Lord speaks to Moses telling him to attack the Midianites because of their deceptive scheming to seduce the Israelites.
- I would like to bring this in for a landing by looking at one of my favorite illustrations; "The Egg, the Carrot, and the Coffee."

- Here's how it goes; "You take a carrot, an egg, and some coffee and put it in a pot of water, then boil it for about twenty minutes.
- When this is done, you are now ready to see how the effects of being subjected to the heat has changed the egg, carrot, and coffee.

TYPE	EFFECT	REASON	BOILING WATER
The Carrot	Is Hard – Becomes Soft	It's Compromised	No Difference
The Egg	Is Weak – Becomes Hard	It's Calloused	No Difference
The Coffee	Is Ground – Becomes Flavor and Color	It's Strong	Big Difference

- Now, this is how this applies to Numbers 25. In temptation, deception and seduction, am I like the carrot, the egg, or the coffee?
 - If I'm like the carrot, I may think I'm strong, but I become weak and soft and falter in compromise in the face of that temptation.
 - If I'm like the egg, I'm already vulnerable, and I become hard, and calloused and my conscience is seared by the hot iron of temptation.
 - If I'm like the coffee, I stand strong and am not changed, rather, I make a difference by making the water flavorful and colorful.
- I see Phinehas as the coffee. He took a strong stand for righteousness and made a difference both being a blessing and being blessed.
- On the other side of that table, I see the Israelites as the carrot and the egg when they were deceived and seduced by the Midianites.
- This begs the question of each one of us; "when faced with a deception and seduction from the enemy, what happens to me?"
- When I preach a sermon on Sunday mornings, or teach a Bible study on Thursday nights, I always try to make sure that first I own it.
- Let me explain; I cannot impart that which I do not possess. In other words, I need to own this, apply this, and live this in my own life first.
- If there's going to be power in our lives, there needs to be purity in our hearts. If not, then our light is dimmed by the filth on our glass.
- My prayer is that this wonderful church will be filled with coffee, spirit filled saints standing strong in temptation or spiritual deception.

"The churches of the land are sprinkled all over with bald-headed old sinners whose hair has been worn off by the constant friction of countless sermons that have been aimed at them and glanced off and hit the man in the pew behind."

(Henry Ward Beecher 1813-1887)